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INFORMATION IN REGARD TO THE LETTERS AND OTHER MANUSCRIPTS OF MORRIS BIRKBECK.

Communicated by Walter Colyer.

**EDITOR OF THE JOURNAL OF THE ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY:**

I was often told by my father, who was born here in the English Settlement in the year 1822, that after the unfortunate death of Morris Birkbeck, one of the distinguished founders of this English colony in the prairies of the Illinois country, certain members of the family removed to Mexico, taking with them a ten-bushel box full of valuable letters, papers and documents, the personal belongings of the great anti-slavery agitator.

As long ago as the fore part of the year 1905 I learned by accident of the residence of Mr. Robert E. Birkbeck, a grandson of Morris, at Brisbane, Australia, where he held an important position in the chief engineers's office of the Royal Queensland Railways.

Addressing Mr. Birkbeck I received from him in due time a very courteous letter in which he informed me that he remembered when journeying from Mexico through London en route to Australia his party picked up a box that had been left in charge of a relative and which contained things that had belonged to his grandfather, Morris Birkbeck, such as papers, documents, drawings, family plate, etc. He explained that all of his father's papers were at his mother's home about 400 miles up the coast from Brisbane. Never having had

the opportunity of examining those papers Mr. Robert Birkbeck was in ignorance of their contents, but he gave it as his opinion that the contents of the package at his mother's home would be found to be those papers, letters and documents carried by the family from the English settlement in Illinois. He was led to this conclusion by the fact that some years previously when his two brothers paid a visit to his mother they returned with a number of old Illinois land deeds, together with some very old Bank of England transfers. He also mentioned having in his possession copies of the drawings sent home by one of his aunts in 1817, showing the first house they lived in, the house his grandfather built afterward, the first church built, etc.

Mr. Birkbeck promised to investigate and to let me hear from him as soon as he found anything respecting the lost papers. This he did in a most painstaking and laborious manner in a letter dated June 4th, 1908. The letter follows:

"WALTER COLYER, Esq.,
"Albion, Illinois, U. S. A.

"DEAR SIR:

"I fear you must have thought I had forgotten the promise made in my letter of 18th of April, 1905, but the fact is my search in my grandfather's papers for something relating to his settlement in Illinois has not proven very successful so far, and I waited in the hopes of more papers being found before again writing to you. I am sending you a list of letters at present in my hands, giving a short resume of their contents. Those letters that contain accounts of events that are now historical are most interesting, but still I fear they are not what you desire.

"About eighteen months ago I paid a hurried visit to my mother's place at Glenmore, and then brought some of the papers, but had no time to make a thorough search. I also had a cursory look through the library and noticed

some of my grandfather's books—'Notes,' &c. I have asked my brother to send me any more old papers that may be found when I will again give myself the pleasure of communicating with you. If you consider any of the letters on the list are of sufficient interest, I will endeavor to copy them out for you to the best of my ability, though some of them are hard to decipher.

"I shall be glad to hear from you again, and happy if I can be of use."

Since the receipt of this letter I have had no further communication from Mr. Birkbeck.

The old letters in Mr. Birkbeck's possession of which he kindly sent a brief synopsis, number 75. They relate to a great number of topics, such as letters from Morris Birkbeck's friends and relatives in England, letters from business associates detailing sales of wool, financial reverses, perfidy and flight of his partner, arrangements for publishing books and pamphlets and the like. In some instances the list contains copies of Birkbeck's replies to his English correspondents. The letters very largely deal with Morris Birkbeck's financial reverses and losses, his quarrel with Cobden [Cobbett?] and his backslicing from the faith of the society of Friends, which evidently caused his home people much distress of mind. The anti-slavery agitation is a favorite topic with Mr. Birkbeck's English friends, and the iniquitous character of the king in his treatment of the English queen is commented upon. The letters date from April, 1805, to May, 1825.

WALTER COYLER.

Albion, Illinois, August 22, 1910.